

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation. It is a violation of the spirit and letter of their broadcasting license for this corporation to force 62 of their television stations, many of which are in key battleground states, to run a "documentary" which is a blatantly anti-Kerry piece, 10 days before an election, free of commercial interruption, in prime time. Calling this documentary "news" is absurd. Suppose a liberal television or radio network were to show the Michael Moore film "Fahrenheit 911" as a "news documentary" this Saturday. Would that be OK?

The first amendment allows for freedom of expression. But even that freedom has limits - the usual example is that one cannot yell "fire" in a crowded theatre just for the fun of it. My opinion is that Sinclair is trying to influence the outcome of this election by presenting "Stolen Honor" as news. Sinclair has every right to support any candidate they want to, but they must clearly state that this is their OPINION, and not attempt to sway people with campaign ads disguised as documentaries. How about requiring them to air a pro-Kerry film like "Going Upriver" right after the "Stolen Honor" film. Sinclair says Kerry's Vietnam service is a legitimate subject for voters to consider. I totally agree - but "consider" means BOTH SIDES of a story.

Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Instead of something produced at "News Central" far away, it's more important that we see real people from our own communities and more substantive news about issues that matter.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard. Thank you.